



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

FIRE DEPARTMENT

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March 13, 2006

TO: EACH SUPERVISOR
FROM: P. MICHAEL FREEMAN *PMF*

SEVEN AGREEMENTS FOR 9-1-1 EMERGENCY AMBULANCE SERVICES AGENDA ITEM 20, MARCH 14, 2006

On Tuesday, March 14, your Board will consider for approval seven agreements for 9-1-1 Emergency Ambulance Services. These agreements, once approved, will be in effect for a period of ten years. Historically, the Department of Health Services, through the Emergency Medical Services Agency, has handled ambulance contracts on behalf of the County. Last week, the Fire Department was asked to offer our assessment of the operational aspects of the proposed Ambulance Contract.

In reality, the Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACoFD) is the primary customer of private ambulance service providers in that we respond to more than 200,000 emergency medical 9-1-1 calls each year in our jurisdiction. Since the last private ambulance contract was awarded, much progress has been made. In large part this progress evolved because the private providers partnered with the Fire Department in operational issues. As a result, there is an efficient and effective informal "partnership" between LACoFD and the private ambulance providers.

Last week, Fire Department and EMS Agency staff met to learn that the seven new proposed agreements do not specify critical operational details in mutual-aid and in large-scale, multi-casualty incidents. What has evolved in such large-scale incidents during the last ten years of operation is not fully and completely addressed in the seven agreements.

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Each Supervisor
March 13, 2006
Page 2

We believe that such critical, emergency operational details should somehow be included contractually in the private ambulance agreements being considered for approval.

A more comprehensive operational assessment is attached for your information. If you have any questions, please contact me at (323) 881-2401.

PMF:at

Attachment

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FIRE DEPARTMENT OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF 9-1-1 EMERGENCY AMBULANCE AGREEMENTS

Introduction

The Fire Department was asked last week to offer an operational assessment of the 9-1-1 Emergency Ambulance Transport Services Agreements and we appreciate this opportunity. As the largest consumer of 9-1-1 ambulance services in the County, these agreements certainly can have a profound impact on the operations of the Fire Department as well as the citizens of Los Angeles County.

On March 9, 2006, we met with representatives from the EMS Agency to discuss the implications that this contract could have upon Fire Department emergency operations. The Agency certainly understood the complexity of these issues and offered any and all assistance for a smooth transition. Nonetheless, there is much to do to ensure normal operations continue seamlessly to protect the citizens of Los Angeles County in the event of a major event. The implementation of these agreements should provide an opportunity to assure comprehensive contractual ambulance service in the day-to-day and major emergencies.

Background

The Los Angeles County Fire Department protects 2,297 square miles, 58 cities and 3.9 million citizens through the strategic placement of 164 fire stations. The Department is an all risk public safety entity utilizing approximately 3,000 firefighters trained to the Emergency Medical Technician I level, with 1,100 of those licensed as paramedics.

The Fire Department partners with the ambulance companies currently contracted to provide 9-1-1 transportation services and they are an integral component of the emergency medical services mission. This partnership has been cultivated over the past several years and resulted in great successes.

On September 11, 2001, the Department went to one of its ambulance partners and activated 10 ambulance strike teams or 50 ambulances within one- and one-half hours of being requested. This was an extraordinary feat and one that was admired throughout the State. Most agreed that this could not have happened anywhere else in such a timely manner. The Glendale train collision was another demonstration of this partnership as 35 ambulances were sent to this disaster. The recent Wayside jail riot was another example as 20 ambulances were sent to care for the casualties this event generated. All these operations were carried out while still maintaining private ambulance capabilities to meet normal day-to-day emergency operations.

Operational Assessment

Existing contract language calls for a 60-day implementation period. This process creates a critical time compression for carrying out the tasks required for such a monumental and complex project. Considering that this contract will lead to the replacement of one of the foundation stones for the provision of 9-1-1 emergency medical care to the citizens of Los Angeles County makes this project even more critical and focuses on the need to “get it right” the first time. We are concerned that there is limited and very non-specific contractual language regarding private ambulance mutual-aid and response to large-scale medical emergencies.

The capabilities for large-scale, multi-casualty disasters certainly had a different focus 10 years ago when the existing 9-1-1 ambulance contracts were implemented as opposed to today when our local, County, State and National governments have been tasked with preparing for a potential terrorist event. The existing language in the 9-1-1 Ambulance Contracts does not specify important elements in providing for such events. Existing language states “contractor will provide backup units and maintain mutual aid agreements with at least two experienced 9-1-1 ambulance providers in Los Angeles County to ensure coverage when the contractor’s units are unable to respond.” This language does not provide for any process or structure for such a profoundly critical responsibility. By comparison, the Los Angeles County Fire Department participates in the California Mutual-Aid System in order to provide protection for the citizens of Los Angeles County when disaster strikes. So merely having agreements with two neighboring fire departments would not fulfill our responsibility in this area.

The Fire Department’s mutual-aid agreements are carefully engineered and crafted to provide protection to the County when the inevitable strikes. This process has been tested time and time again and works well. This type of engineering must be considered for the 9-1-1 ambulance network that provides lifesaving services to the citizens of Los Angeles County whose lives are entrusted to the County and the Fire Department.

The County must be assured that the ambulance companies which are assigned to each of the 7 operating zones have contractual requirements to provide timely and effective mutual-aid service. We must be assured that the processes and strategies needed are in place for the implementation of such a critical service.

Recommendations

The Fire Department believes that the following milestones should be incorporated into the proposed contracts:

- An effective mutual-aid program be engineered for the provision of ambulance coverage in the event of a disaster. This engineering must include the structure and processes necessary to seamlessly respond large numbers of ambulance resources within the County when needed. This process should consider the models provided by the Fire Service which has exercised this process many times.

- The capability of each ambulance company should be contractually specified regarding its ability to participate in a carefully engineered mutual-aid program.
- Mutual-aid performance levels should be identified and processes in place to assure the effectiveness of the program.

It is understood that some of these milestones could be accomplished within the 60-implementation period identified in the contract. Many cannot be accomplished, namely the mutual-aid provisions, and these may be the most important.

The establishment of a service level by private ambulance providers for the next 10 years should be considered as an opportunity for the County to contractually engineer a system that will provide for the protection of its citizens in routine emergencies and catastrophic ones as well.